

Teens' Online Safety Improved by Education, Research Shows

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Think protecting young teenagers on the Internet is important? Then be sure they think it's important, too, according to a forthcoming article in *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

Researchers from the University at Buffalo and University of Maryland surveyed 285 preteens and early teenagers, both male and female, to determine how important they felt it was to protect their privacy online and if those beliefs affected what actions they took to protect that privacy.

Students were asked whether they protected their personal information on the Internet, whether they opened e-mails from unknown senders and whether they downloaded files from unknown people or Web sites.

The researchers found that preteens and early teenagers who were educated on the importance of Internet privacy through school, parents or the media were more likely to practice online safety than those who weren't.

Furthermore, among teachers, peers and parents, the researchers found that parents were the most influential.

A surprising result of the study was that experiencing a privacy breach online did not cause teens to improve their online safety practices, according to one of the researchers, H. R. Rao, professor of management science and systems in the UB School of Management

"Students who experience Internet privacy breaches or computer security problems show less protective behavior on the Internet," says Rao. "This increases the chances that they will be victims again in the future."

The study also showed that girls tend to practice more protective behavior on the Web than boys. The researchers believe this is because girls consider online privacy more important than boys do.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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